DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 363 356 IR 054 710

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TITLE Hungarian Librarianship in Transition: An Academic Case Study.
PUB DATE [93]
NOTE 25p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *Change; *College Libraries; Context Effect; Cultural Background; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Information Technology; Library Automation; *Library Development; Library Planning; Library Science; Library Services; Needs Assessment; *Political Influences; *Technological Advancement
IDENTIFIERS Historical Background; *Hungary

ABSTRACT

This case study of the Kossuth Lajos Tudomanyegyetem, an academic library in Debrecen (Hungary), conducted in May 1992, describes its functioning and needs. Information gathered through a series of interviews, tours, library reports, and a review of relevant literature forms the basis for the case study. An overview of the library in its historical and cultural context sets the stage for an in-depth review of the library's technical processing, acquisitions practices, and public services approach. The study goes on to examine the broader issues in Hungary of higher education, professional status of librarians, library automation, and the challenges of change facing libraries in the near future. The disappearance of nation-wide central control and planning in the changing context of Hungarian politics could result in inefficient application of efforts and the adoption of incompatible standards and technology if a new pattern of strong cooperation between libraries is not developed. Central planning and librarian education are crucial for the development of Hungarian libraries. (Contains 13 references.) (SLD)

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Hungarian Librarianship in Transition: An Academic Case Study

by

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Abstract:

In May, 1992, one of the authors visited the Kossuth Lajos Tudomanyeyetem, an academic library in Debrecen, Hungary. Information gathered through a series of interviews, tours, library reports, and a review of relevant literture forms the basis for this case study. An overview of the library in its historical and cultural context sets the stage for an in-depth review of the library's technical processing, acquisitions practices, and public service approach. The study goes on to examine the broader issues, in Hungary, higher education, professional status of librarians, issues surrounding library automation, and the looming challenges of change facing libraries in the near future.

The authors would like to thank the entire staff of the KLTE library for making this case study not only possible, but also fun to do; especially Klara Koltay, Maria Korompai, Olga Gomba, Iren Levai, and Judit Pal.

Libraries reflect the societies that create and maintain them. This basic premise makes for an especially interesting study at a time of great societal changes, such as those which Hungary has been undergoing for the last few years. What happens to libraries when state economy and one-party rule disintegrates and gives way to multi-party democracy and capitalism; when the carefully if artificially created balance of social roles and values is upset by the seemingly omnipotent rules of market economy; when the morality of passive resistance is suddenly replaced by the importance of well-informed active participation? How much room does the country have to reinvent itself and create a unique social model instead of merely conforming to an existing one? How much room does the profession have to do the same? There is very little being written on what is currently happening in Hungarian -- or, for that matter, East European -- libraries. The following case study of an academic library in Hungary gives some insight into the problems and challenges created by these changes and uncertainties. This article is based on a series of interviews and tours conducted in the Kossuth Lajos Tudomanyegyetem library in May, 1992 and a review of relevant literature. It will examine Hungarian higher education and the organizational structure of the library; investigate issues surrounding library automation; discuss the education, continuing education, and professional status of librarians; and isolate crucial areas that need attention in the near future.

The Kossuth Lajos Tudomanyegyetem, or KLTE for short (Lajos Kossuth University of Arts and Sciences), is one of several universities of Debrecen, the largest city of Hungary after Budapest. What today are separate universities reporting to separate ministries, some decades ago were different colleges of the same institution. Hence the clearly defined focuses of instruction: medicine, agriculture, theology, music, and, in the case of "the Kossuth", arts and sciences.

Hungarian higher education is very different from the American system, and understanding some of these differences is crucial to understanding the library. The first major difference, namely the fact that higher education is free, shapes the whole system. Since the government subsidizes every degree earned by Hungarian citizens in Hungary, it wants to make sure it will not produce too many university graduates for the job market. So, the fierce competition that American graduates go through in finding employment (after, it may be added, having invested their own money in pursuit of their degrees) occurs at the university admission level in Hungary. There, high school graduates apply for specific majors and must pass a rigorous series of written and oral tests. For popular majors it is common for 20 to 30 candidates to compete for each spot. Classes are relatively small, the dropout rate low. The graduate's chances of finding employment are excellent (or at least they were before the economic problems that ushered in the recent political changes became serious.) Since students are admitted for a specific program, that subject area is all they study for the five years of their university education. General

studies are considered part of high school, not university education. There are of course graduate degrees, but the procedure for obtaining them is different from American graduate programs. There are no full-time graduate students, and the emphasis is on research. Coursework is kept to a minimum because the five years of specialized coursework all undergraduates go through prepares them for even the most advanced degree. This system of higher education was in place during the forty years of socialism and had not been significantly changed by the summer of 1992 despite several plans to westernize it.

The library of KLTE has a double mission. On the one hand it supports the educational and research needs of the university community, and on the other it has, since 1952, provided backup national library services to the national library located in Budapest, the Orszagos Szechenyi Konyvtar (OSzK). This backup function means that the KLTE library receives two free non-circulating depository copies of every publication printed in Hungary, and it strives also to collect material on Hungarian subjects published abroad. This function as well as its capable staff and prestigous history going back to 1912 make the KLTE library the second richest collection of Hungary even though it is only the eleventh most visited one (1990 data: 1. OSzK 7 million 41 thousand items, 2. KLTE 3 million 702 thousand items. 1. OSzK 22,700 readers, 11. KLTE 6,100 readers.)[1]

The library is funded by the university. Since it is housed in the beautiful main building of the university together with teaching departments, auditoriums, classrooms and some of the 34 branch and

departmental libraries, most building and equipment maintainance costs and the salaries and wages of the 100 library employees are all paid centrally by the university. Almost all of the library's budget (3.6 million Ft in 1992) goes to book acquisitions (3.3 million Ft). Serials and standing orders used to be part of the library's budget, but with the skyrocketing inflation of serial prices the library can no longer cover these expenses; thus they have been transferred to the university's budget in the hopes that it will be easier to find the money for the subscriptions in that much bigger a budget. This way they have been able to keep most of the old subscriptions, but new subscriptions are next to impossible to fund. The rest of the library budget goes to operating expenses such as office supplies, travel, mail, fax, etc. The budget is just barely enough for basic collection development and the maintainance of the present level of services. Fortunately, the library has been very successful in securing grant money to fund additional collection development, special projects, and librarian exchanges. Mellon Foundation money was used to buy books and CD-ROMs; Volkswagen gave the KLTE library 100,000 German marks to buy books and serials; the Soros Foundation, Pittsburgh University, Oxford University Press, the French Cultural Institute and the British Council regularly donate books. The European Community's Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies (TEMPUS) project gives Hungarian librarians a chance to spend from several weeks to several months in Western European libraries. One sincerely hopes that the current level of interest among international foundations will not fade away once the novelty of a capitalist Eastern Europe wears off. World Bank loans (1.5 million dollars) are being used to fund the single biggest and most

exciting project of recent years: the development of an integrated library system for the higher education and research institutions of the city. Recent grant proposals include a retrospective conversion project and the further development of the existing Ethernet to reach departmental and branch libraries. Current library income is limited to cost recovery on some online searching, and a substantial (1,000,000 Ft) profit on photocopying services.

The library is managed by an executive director who reports directly to the president of the university. The executive director and her assistant director supervise the heads of all departments, namely the heads of acquisitions, bibliography, descriptive cataloging, readers' services, serials, music, automation, duplication, bindery, and translation services. This management group makes all the decisions. Task forces and committees to cut across the hierarchical organizational structure and provide opportunities for staff input and recommendations are unknown.

The **acquisitions department** is charged with the mechanics of acquiring new items for the collection. Acquisitions places orders for new titles and processes incoming depository items. Technical aspects of book exchange programs are also handled by acquisitions. The national library coordinates a formal book exchange program by distributing lists of available books to libraries. Selections from this list of mostly Hungarian duplicates are available for no cost to the library. KLTE also has a number of international contacts with individual libraries. Due to economic and cultural

factors these relationships are somewhat unbalanced, since KLTE finds it difficult to reciprocate books at an equal value.

After the acquisitions department purchases a title, the book goes to the **subject librarians**, who, among other things, assign call numbers and subject headings to the incoming books and file the cards produced by the descriptive cataloging department into the shelflist. The reason why no paraprofessional or student labor is used for the repetitious task of filing is to give subject librarians a chance to continuously review the collection in their assigned areas. Call numbers are assigned using the Universal Decimal Classification schedules. No controlled subject heading list is in use; individual librarians decide what heading to assign based on their extensive subject knowledge and a few common-sense rules such as assigning the most specific heading possible. The limitations of this method are so readily acknowledged by librarians that they do not even assign subject headings to every book. The rule of thumb is to assign headings to books of more general appeal, but leave the access to the more specialized research sources up to the public shelflist arranged by UDC number. This system does require some librarian assistance, but seems to work sufficiently well for the time being. The advent of the computer catalog will ultimately improve access.

This approach also means that the only complete catalog of library holdings is the author-title catalog. Actually, there are two different author-title catalogs: the complete staff and the somewhat abridged public catalogs. Both are up-to-date, and contrary to what the names suggest, both are open to the public.

The distinction between the two only makes sense if considered from a historical perspective. In the darkest years of the 1950's the public catalog had a "readers' advisory" function, essentially a euphemism for political censorship. Since KLTE has been a depository library since 1952, the collection always contained some potentially objectionable material, hence the difference of scope between the two catalogs. The staff catalog was opened up for public use more than 25 years ago, but it is less centrally located than the "politically correct" one. This story has interesting echoes even today. With the privatization of the printing process and the emergence of the cultural market economy, pulp literature is making a return to Hungary with a vengeance. The enormous number of these books that make it into the collection due to the depository plan gave rise to a controversy in the library: should they be included in the public catalog, or just the staff catalog?

Subject librarians are also responsible for selecting reference and circulating books, providing specialized bibliographic instruction for classes, providing in-depth reference service on demand for their subject specialties, and serving on the information desk in their assigned subject reading room. The recent acquisition of some CD-ROMs adds yet another dimension to this department. Since there are no general studies components in the university curriculum, electronic reference sources exclusively support well-defined subject areas; hence these services are becoming part of the bibliographers' jobs. Current CD-ROM titles include *Religion Index*, *Art Index*, *Languages of the World*, and *Bibliographie Nationale Française*, among others. Their success has so far been very limited. The first subscriptions were started in 1991,

apparently without realizing that in some cases the data is only leased for the duration of the subscription. Because of this oversight some titles will soon be disappearing due to lack of continued funds. Other titles, one-time purchases and a few subscriptions, will stay on, and it is up to the individual bibliographer to "sell" the products to the professors and students of the teaching departments. This works better in some cases than others, in accordance with the librarian's and department's openness to new technology and, in most cases, foreign languages. There is one position in this department assigned to producing access tools such as indexes to local newspapers and bibliographies of famous local professors. This work is being done using ISIS, a Pascal-based database manager developed by UNESCO.

It is the **descriptive cataloging department** that finishes the cataloging process started by the subject librarians. No cataloging utility or CIP is currently in use, so each book gets cataloged through this cumbersome process at every library in the country. About six years ago the ISO standard was introduced as a new format for descriptive cataloging. Catalog and shelflist cards are still produced by typewriters. This isolated manual method of descriptive cataloging is one of the major difficulties that need to be overcome in order to make libraries more effective. Machine-readable shared cataloging is currently being planned together with the national library.

The **readers' services department** has a wide area of public service responsibility including running the circulation desk and the service desk in the general reading room, providing general

bibliographic instruction and reference services, processing interlibrary loan requests, and, the most thankless task there is in a closed-stacks library, paging books. The closed stacks arrangement is dictated by the old design of the library building as well as physical security issues mandated by the depository system. The building in which the library is located was built in 1932. The designer thought it would provide adequate space for the library for a hundred years, for up to half a million volumes. Now, sixty years later the same structure holds more than twice that many books. The space problem is so chronic that parts of some subject reference collections actually overflow into neighboring offices. Readers' services is the department that has had to deal with another legacy of the old political system, the closed section. This section was created in the 1950's, and in those days it was a collection of considerable size containing every book that was objectionable for any reason. Access to these books was dependent on a written permit from a teaching department. In the liberal 1960's and even more liberal 1980's a large number of these books were incorporated into the regular collection. Now the closed section contains about 20 shelves of books, mainly ones that degrade ethnic and national groups, and pornographic literature. Since 1987 no permission has been needed to read these books; the term "closed section" denotes only a shelving location and the fact that these are non-circulating books.

Because CD-ROMs are the responsibility of the bibliographers, the only electronic sources used by the general reference librarians are the ISIS-based locally produced newspaper index and university bibliography, and the OSzK-produced and locally edited national

bibliography of serials. The department would like to add *Books in Print* on CD-ROM to the list of its computerized resources to expand access to the library's significant English-language collection as well as to books not held by the institution.

Other departments are **serials**, taking care of the technical services aspects of periodicals, and its public services twin, **serials readers' services**. The latter shares the old university church building with the **music library**, a curious addition in a university that does not have a music program. The reason for its existence is the national library function of the library on the one hand, and the history of the institution on the other. As mentioned earlier, it was not until the early fifties that the colleges of the old university were separated into different institutions, and music began to be taught in an independent school. KLTE never stopped building its music collection, however, so today its music library is bigger than that of the music school. Fortunately, the music school is located across the street from KLTE, so their students make heavy use of the KLTE collection.

The **automation department**, founded as a separate unit in 1990, is in charge of all aspects of automation in the library including online searching. It has created an Ethernet LAN connecting the main library with the church building. This project was funded by the Informacios Infrastruktura Fejlesztesi Program, IIFP for short (Information Infrastructure Development Program.) The department has also participated in the ongoing RFP process for an integrated library system. Online searching is also handled by this

department. When the service was first considered it was going to be offered by the subject librarians. It was soon discovered, however, that with no computer experience, bibliographers did not feel comfortable with the idea of interacting with a computer in a foreign language when every minute costs money, so the responsibility was assigned to the automation department. In 1990 155 searches were conducted through Dialog, STN, Questel, and Data-Star.[2] The majority of the searches are conducted either on grant money or in the free databases of the current month. The main difficulty with electronic database searching is the lack of Hungarian databases. There are no online database vendors in Hungary, and only a handful of CD-ROMs are produced there, so the language barrier is definitely a problem for some patrons, and for others the U.S.-Western Europe oriented databases fail to provide appropriate results. In the few cases when the results perfectly match the information needs, it might be difficult to find the sources in a timely manner. On top of all this is the problem of exchange rates and differences in salary structure, which make the results too expensive for even the well-established researchers.

Members of the automation department are typically young graduates of the local computer science program with no previous library training or experience. It is not surprising that they are somewhat out of synch with the rest of the library staff who tend to have long years of experience in an exclusively manual library environment. There is some sentiment that the automation people do not have enough understanding of the library, that they are "techies" who need to become more thoroughly indoctrinated in librarianship and be better communicators. It is also probably

true that librarians need to develop more understanding of and expertise in the electronic medium.

Other service departments are **duplication**, charged with meeting the university's publishing and photocopying needs, **the bindery**, and **translation services**. The latter is significant because Hungarian belongs to a small, isolated family of languages, Finno-Ugrian; thus translating must play a significant role in international information transfer.[3]

Since we already mentioned some negative effects of the communist years, let us also touch upon some ways they positively impacted on the KLTE library. The collection benefited enormously from the closing of some church-owned libraries and disbanding of the book collections of aristocrats in the 1950's. The majority of these volumes were added to OSzK and the KLTE library. The other gain of the library was personnel-related. Intellectuals of national renown who were not deemed ideologically dependable enough to publish or teach were transferred to library jobs. These first-rank scholars, poets, and scientists-turned-librarians represented an incredible intellectual wealth and energy that enriched the institution for decades. Their recent example makes the scholar-librarian model influential even today.

The most challenging project currently undertaken by the library is the implementation of the integrated library system that will eventually connect all five university and research libraries in the city of Debrecen. The preparation for the RFP process started a couple of years ago with a complete analysis of workflow and work

processes. Part of the challenge of writing an RFP with no firsthand automation experience is the partial lack of vision of what is possible and desirable. Trips to foreign libraries working with well-established systems are only of limited help, since these systems are mostly built to serve the Anglo-American library model. The difficult task of "translation" between cultures and systems is necessary. Decisions need to be made about which unique aspects of the Hungarian library system to keep, and which aspects need to be remodeled on the Anglo-American system. Yet another challenge is planning cooperation with other libraries, such as the national library, whose whole system is also in transition with a thus far unpredictable outcome. The gradual evolution in automation that western libraries experienced is replaced by a sudden revolution in Hungary. Libraries must try to plan and RFP their integrated systems at the same time that the Hungarian MARC standard is just being developed by the national library, and basic questions about cooperative cataloging cannot yet be answered. Despite these difficulties plans are being made to partly import, partly edit, and partly develop a database that will include all Hungarian books published after 1976, the library's full foreign language collection, and all serial holdings. A union catalog of the largest Hungarian libraries is also being planned based on shortened cataloging records. The RFP also calls for connectivity with CD-ROM towers. One concern that has not been resolved yet is the funding for the high maintenance cost of the integrated system.

In addition to a successful resolution of the automation project, several librarians interviewed suggested the need to make the library more public. That would mean moving from a

collection-centric to a user-centric atmosphere. This view does not negate the high level of service dedication that I see in the library staff; rather, it is symptomatic of the current situation in which it is the collection that justifies services, not the other way round.

The training, status, and continuing education of librarians is an interesting question. Recent years in the United States settled the question of what defines a librarian: an MLS. In Hungary the answer is not all that clearcut. There are two different ways to get a librarian degree: one is a four-year college degree, and the other is a five-year university degree. But, strangely enough, a five-year university degree in an unrelated subject area is valued more highly than a four-year librarian degree. The equivalent of a professional appointment is dependent on a university degree in any subject area, or, in some cases, ten years of related library experience which can be substituted for the degree. The bearer of a four-year librarian degree can only get jobs that are roughly equivalent to a paraprofessional position.

The kind of appointment (professional vs. paraprofessional, or in their vocabulary, scholarly vs. librarian) is dependent on the job description and, in some cases, on the qualifications of the appointee. Certain jobs, such as general reference librarians and bibliographers, require professional appointments. A university diploma and demonstrated knowledge of one or more foreign languages are basic requirements for such a position. Advancement is dependent on a graduate degree and publications. This system is modeled after research institutions rather than teaching

departments. For other positions, such as descriptive catalogers, or circulation desk workers, employees can be hired with only a high school or college diploma. These are the librarian appointments. Advancement in these positions depends primarily upon job performance and length of service. If, however, someone in a paraprofessional job meets all the requirements for a professional appointment, that person's appointment can be changed into professional without necessarily changing the job assignment. This of course means a higher salary, but, since the job does not require the professional appointment, these people do not get the same support (e.g. time off for research) as professional appointees in professionals only jobs.

It is interesting to note that most publications are not what we would call professional articles, but rather tend to deal with the original subject interest of the researcher, or are bibliographic in nature. This, together with the preference for subject degrees and paraprofessional appointments that are labeled "library" appointments, demonstrates the prevalence of the scholar-librarian model. As the head of the bibliographers pointed out, for this "elite" model to really work more of the professionals' time would need to be freed up from tasks that do not require a university education.

Professional salaries compare favorably with the salaries of teaching faculty. They earn the same base salary, but librarians often surpass the teaching faculty because of supplemental pay they receive for their foreign language skills. This can be quite substantial, up to thirty percent of the salary for fluency in two

languages. Librarians feel they get respect from the teaching faculty for their professional knowledge, but not necessarily for their subject knowledge. Respect from students, however, is a different question. One librarian puts it this way: "the public does not differentiate between people they see behind a counter in a shoe store and in a pharmacy. All they notice is that they get waited on." She also points out that when students enter a professor's office, or a financial aid office, they knock on the door, but they will not necessarily do so before entering a librarian's office.

Professional service is not highly regarded. Activity in library associations is not required for advancement, and even those who do it value their ties with subject organizations more. Continuing education is not encouraged in a systematic manner. Some such activities are tied to professional organizations, but it is more common to take advantage of a paid workshop, usually on a computer-related topic. The latter seems to be of major importance on the eve of change from a manual system environment to an automated one.

The following years will be crucial for Hungarian librarianship as well as for the whole country. Decisions being made or neglected today will influence the future for a long time to come. By its nature librarianship is dependent on several social and economic factors that will no doubt shape its face in a thus far unpredictable way. What does the future hold for the national economy? How much public support can higher education and the information infrastructure count on? What is the fate of Hungarian

research and development? Will there be a healthy balance struck between integration into the international research scene and the looming dangers of braindrain? How competitive can national culture and scholarship be in a global cultural market economy? Time will not stand still while all these variables get worked out. This simple fact represents both an enormous challenge and a great opportunity for the profession. While it is very difficult to do meaningful planning for the unknown, this is also a great chance to actively participate in the shaping of the future. There is no better time to be proactive than now, when it is becoming hard to be reactive.

The social isolation of the profession is a recurring complaint in the professional literature.[4] Katsanyi describes nation-wide library use during the seventies as modest; the first half of the eighties saw a stagnation of these use figures, and during the second half of the eighties even this modest use dropped dramatically. It is the erosion of larger social structures that is reflected in these low figures. From 1991 the number of users showed a sharp increase due to large-scale social changes. The profession has a mandate to satisfy the newly demonstrated information needs, thus securing for itself a more respected, better-integrated role in society.

"The only way to change how society thinks of and relates to libraries is through services...Strategical plans need to center around services such as electronic communication networks, national and integrated international databases, and document delivery."[5] This is the Hungarian librarians' best chance to start resolving

the problem of the social isolation of librarianship by actively creating and marketing services that will make the library a real factor in the new, evolving society.

Libraries, especially university and college libraries also have a big role to play in the teaching of information technologies. Modern intellectuals (and citizens, for that matter) need to become conversant in methods and techniques needed for electronic research.[6] The new emphasis on service and teaching is consistent with Lancaster's vision of the profession as "a facilitator of communication (i.e., a facilitator of access to recorded knowledge)."[7] No such model can work optimally without actively soliciting staff creativity and input into the decision making process within the individual library and creating an empowering environment that is conducive to such participation. A related issue is making the search process public for all positions, especially managerial ones.[8]

Just how should the library reinvent itself? How much should be learned from the West? What services should be offered and how should they be marketed to the user community? The answers must come from the analysis of particular situations if they are to be useful. User need studies such as the excellent one done at KLTE several years ago can be useful[9]. They should not be the only source of information, however, since users' input might be limited by the framework of currently available services. A thorough knowledge and creative interpretation of the teaching and research process as well as possible uses of information from the user community need to be a part of the evaluation process. The results

of such an evaluation should be trusted more than the facile imitation of Western patterns. Techniques employed in the West are no panacea, as evidenced by the fact that Western libraries are also looking to reorganize in hopes of solving problems -- some very similar to the problems facing their Hungarian counterparts. Latecomers do have a unique advantage; they have a chance to look around, evaluate what they see, take whatever is worthwhile, and not be limited in their innovation by the present state of affairs. They can, so to speak, leap from yesterday directly to tomorrow. One hopes that librarianship will "include the continuation of the basic philosophy of cultural preservation, accumulation and mediation that has proved successful for thousands of years in their reviving activities."[10]

The disappearance of nation-wide central control and planning could result in inefficient duplication of efforts and the adaption of incompatible standards and technology, if a new pattern of strong cooperation between libraries is not developed. This cooperation should encompass such areas as developing standards for automated technical processing, collection development and document delivery to address nagging space and financial problems, and defining directions, goals, and guidelines for the whole profession. The lack of automated bibliographic access to Hungarian journal literature and the missing "link" of a national bibliographic utility can also be best remedied by the voluntary cooperation of libraries and possibly entrepreneurs.[11] Strengthening professional association activities seems crucial to increased cooperation and coordination. The OSzK-run Konyvtartudomanyi es Modszertani Kozpont (Library Science and Methodology Center) is also

well-positioned to foster cooperation among the roughly eight thousand Hungarian librarians.

A need for central planning has been evident in the country's new information infrastructure and information policy. It is very important that librarians be involved in any such activities from the very beginning. Committees dealing with national information systems should have representatives from academic libraries.[12]

Librarian education is also of great importance for shaping the future of Hungarian librarianship. "A modern librarian should be active, dynamic, future-oriented, able to organize information systems and services, able to focus on user needs, able to handle multi-media collections and, last but not least, able to acquire scientifically-based management skills."[13] Training such professionals is the task of library educators; making full use of their expertise and keeping them happy in the profession is a challenge for library administrators. A systematic program of continuing education also needs to be developed to update the skills of librarians whose formal education or on-the-job training has not been sufficient to prepare them for this new model of librarianship.

The study of Hungarian librarianship today is a study of change. This article attempts to describe the point of departure for one particular academic library in the provincial city of Debrecen as well as to define new directions for the profession. Where they are going is still uncharted territory, so reports of progress are anxiously awaited by the worldwide library community.

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